



WV-CAG TOP PRIORITIES

“Tort Reform”
Rears Its Head

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Clean
Elections

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Ethics Public
Hearing on
Monday!

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Prescription
Fairness For
WV!

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More Inside

Ray of Hope

by Linda Mallet, linda@wvcag.org

Lobbying at the Capitol is a frustrating experience, to say the least. To go up there day after day one needs a bit of inspiration and encouragement, a ray of hope, if you will. This week we have had much-needed rays delivered, thankfully.

Gary and Norm returned from a USAction meeting with their ray of hope. The coalition opposing the Bush Social Security privatization scare is strengthening and we're a part of it. We'll have much-needed funding to do important grass-roots organizing to help convince Rep. Capito that our citizens aren't buying Bush's latest "crisis." Maybe Bush doesn't care but there's a 2006 election coming up and we need to remind our House Republican that we're watching. Folks, we are in a win-win situation here. She either does the right thing now or we remind people of her voting record about a year from now.

There are rays of hope at our Capitol as well. This week not a soul in House Judiciary spoke out against the Child's Right to Nurse Act and the bill now goes to the House floor. It was so encouraging to join our progressive friends as they watched this bill fly through the committee. In a world where there's opposition to everything, and male legislators can vote against a proclamation to make March 3 Women's Day at the Capitol, it was good to see common sense prevail.

Clean Elections is resting in the House and Senate Judiciary committees while we lobby members of both houses. The ray of hope is that leadership is behind us on this issue and is giving us the breathing room we need to help insure success.

Tort reform legislation seems to run amok this session.

Our ray of hope here is a bill introduced this week by Delegate Poling that would prevent our credit reports from being used in decision on our home and auto insurance.

Money is scarce and appeals abound but **our best ray of hope this week came from you all.** Dozens of you took the time and the expense to send us donations to help us get through the session.

We'll keep you posted as these rays brighten.

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W V - C A G
was founded in 1974
as a non-profit
membership
organization
dedicated to
increasing citizen
participation
in economic and
political decision-
making.

Our members
work for progressive
changes in federal,
state, and local policies
by educating people
about key public
interest issues ranging
from environmental
protection and
consumer rights to
good government and
health care reform.

Bush's Latest Blunder

by *Norm Steenstra, norm@wvcag.org*

After 3 intense days with US Action affiliates from around the country, Gary and I are convinced that Social Security privatization may well be Bush's biggest domestic blunder.

His "privatization" plan is attracting the kind of opposition we haven't seen for a long time. Better yet, Democrats appear more united to defeat the president's plan than perhaps they've been on any issue in five years. Best yet, people are getting organized. Everywhere Bush goes in his "60 stops in 60 days" propaganda campaign, there will be displays of disgust.

Bush will likely visit our state very soon to prop up fence-sitting Republican Shelley Moore Capito and when he does we will be there in force! One thing to keep in mind in the Social Security debate is the longer we can draw it out the more likely the President and the stock brokers will lose the fight.

Victory will come to us not in a dramatic vote in Congress but rather by making the issue so hot to handle that the Republican leadership never allows it to come to a vote. Some progressive beltway observers believe that if the president continues to press the issue, it may well cost his party control of the House in the 2006 election.

For all of you who have been in a state of political depression since the election, please become a part of this important fight for social justice. Calls to your Congresspersons and Senators, as well as letters to the editor will help ensure victory on this historic battle to turn the tide in Washington. Please contact us if you'd like any more info or want special notification of up coming events.

Protect Social Security

West Virginians United to Protect Social Security needs your help to oppose privatization and benefit cuts to this important government program. Write letters to the editor and to your Congressional Reps. Talk to everyone and have them sign our petition. We need to keep the promise we made to our retirees, people with disabilities, widows, orphans and everyone who will someday need this benefit.

Call Marge at 346-5891 or 866-WVB-FAIR.

UnCivil Justice Bills Introduced

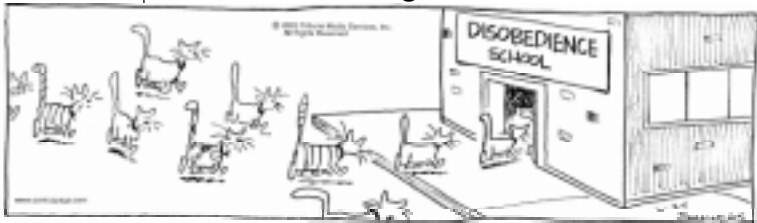
by Gary Zuckett, garyz@wvcag.org

SB 421 was introduced this week and sent to Senate Judiciary. It's really the Insurance Company Immunity Bill - it effectively shields any insurance company from being sued when they negotiate in bad faith. One common example is offering thousands less to settle consumers' claims in order to delay and pressure the insured to take less to get a car repaired to get back to work. If this passes, complaints from anywhere in the state must be filed with the Insurance Commission in Charleston (who thinks its job is to create a good business climate for the insurance industry). Call members of the Senate Judiciary (especially chairman Kessler) and ask them to "just say no" to insurance company immunity when dealing in bad faith.

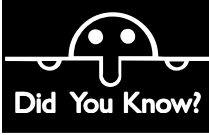
The toothless Consumer Advocate's bill (HB 2028 & SB 418) introduced by the governor this week will not help anyone. The governor would get to appoint the new Advocate. A much better bill is HB 2388, which makes the Advocate's office independent of the Insurance Commission (like the Advocate at the Public Service Commission). Talk is circulating about a proposal to move the Insurance Consumer Advocate to the Attorney General's office because they have such a good record of consumer protection. Now there's a sensible idea!

While we're at it why not have the Insurance Commissioner elected by the people he or she is supposed to be protecting? Us! Right now she is an appointee of the governor. We have an elected Commissioner of Agriculture so, why not? Stay tuned for more on these issues next week.

From the Herding Cats File.....



For more info
Check out the
Victims' Rights
section on our
website at
www.wvcag.org



Did You Know?

Some health care plans cover Viagra but not contraceptives!

Prescription Fairness for WV Women and Families

by Julie Archer, julie@wvcag.org

During the 2004 legislative session, WV-CAG was part of a diverse coalition calling for fairness and equality in prescription coverage. Encouraged by the positive momentum this legislation had last year, these groups have once again joined to demand prescription fairness for West Virginia women and families. The coalition is headed by the WV FREE

The governor's Ethics Bill (SB 53) still does not address the abuses brought to light in the Mezzatesta and Ross scandals. There is a public hearing scheduled for 11AM in the House chamber on this bill. Please make it if you can! Call 346-5891 for more information and talking points! If you can't attend, we can deliver your written statement. E-mail it to linda@wvcag.org.

Coalition for Reproductive Freedom but is comprised of many organizations including the National Association of Social Workers and the ACLU.

When WV FREE contacted us about being part of this coalition, it was basically a "no brainer." As consumers, women and families are getting a raw deal from their insurance providers. Over 97% of health insurance plans provide coverage for prescription drugs, but nearly half of typical large-group insurance plans fail to routinely cover contraceptives. As a result, women of childbearing age pay 68% more for basic health care than men in the same age group because they must pay for birth control out of pocket. This is an issue of basic fairness and equality but it is also a pocketbook issue for many families.

On Tuesday we expect the **SB 37** to be taken up by the Senate Committee on Banking and Insurance. If your legislator serves on this committee, please him or her to support the WV Prescription Fairness Act. Committee members are Senators Minard, Jenkins, Chafin, Fanning, Foster, Helmick, Kessler, Prezioso, Sharpe, Deem, Facemyer, Guills, Lanham and Minear. While we are currently targeting members of this key committees, all legislators need to hear from their constituents that providing contraceptive equity is the right thing to do. It's about basic fairness and equality!

Contraception is basic health care and insurance should cover it.

“Clean Elections is about bringing back grassroots, one-to-one politics, the way it used to be, instead of high-dollar media campaigns financed by huge corporation from the well-heeled. Clean Elections is about the restoration of democracy.”
Marc Spitzer (R)
Arizona Corporate Commission



More info available at:
www.wvoter-owned.org

Support Urged for Voter-Owned Elections!

The Public Campaign Financing Pilot Project Act (HB 2486 & SB 247) is resting in the Senate and House Judiciary committees while its problems are worked on. Although the bill has bi-partisan support most Republicans continue to oppose the bill and seek other sweeping reforms (term limits, single-member districts, campaign spending limits), and many Democrats remain undecided.

Please contact your Delegate(s) and Senator(s) and voice your support of the pilot project. A pilot project will provide valuable information on how voter-owned, publicly-financed elections would work in West Virginia, by shedding light on the benefits, as well as the potential problems. Tell them that the pilot project is about more than giving others a chance against incumbents, it's about promoting a more vigorous democracy by bringing more people into the political process and giving voters more choices. Incumbency will always remain a powerful factor, but more competition results in more issues being raised and debated, and holds incumbents accountable to the voters. Your voice is greatly appreciated!

Points worth mentioning to your Legislator(s):

·I support a pilot project for publicly financed campaigns because I want an election process that is voter-owned and centers on the issues.

·Using public money levels the playing field and gives people from many backgrounds a fair shot at getting elected.

·I'm concerned about accountability and control – I want laws passed that focus on the needs of all voters, not just a select few who can afford to make big campaign contributions.

·I believe the publicly financed campaign bill is a sensible approach to changing the status quo, a new way to deal with an old problem.

·Candidate participation is VOLUNTARY.

·Candidates could spend less time raising money, and more time spent talking with voters.

·Cost for pilot project is \$500,000, *less than 30 cents per state resident.*

·In WV, less than one-half of one percent of the voting age population contributes to candidates running for office.

Movement Expected on 527 Legislation

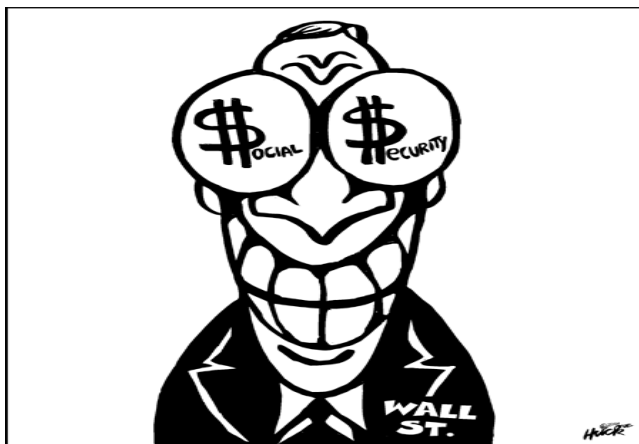
by Julie Archer, julie@wvcag.org

Next week we anticipate movement on proposed legislation to reign in 527 groups, as the bill is taken up in the Senate Judiciary Committee. Recommended during interims by the Select Committee on Campaign Finance Reform, SB 245 would make statewide and legislative elections comply with the federal Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act or McCain-Feingold law which prohibits the use of “soft-money” in election-related communications. Dubbed the “anti-Don Blankenship bill” by the *Charleston Gazette*, the legislation would require greater disclosure of contributors to 527 groups, like ‘And for the Sake of the Kids,’ and limit the amount an individual, political committee or political party could contribute to such groups.

This legislation is complementary to establishing a system of voter-owned, publicly-financed elections because such a system is likely to have more appeal to candidates if they aren’t faced with the looming threat that they might be targeted by such independent groups. It will be interesting to see how this plays out. We look for support of this legislation to break down along party lines, as Republicans are likely to dismiss Democrats motivations as just “sour grapes” over the outcome of the Supreme Court race.

“I never heard one single person at any door say, ‘Oh well, I don’t think that’s a good use of public money.’”

Maine State Senator Lynn Bromley (D) talking about Clean Elections in her state.



Important Events

March 21

Patriots For Peace Public Forum

6:30-8 P.M.

'IRAQ: How Long Should We Stay?'

Speaking from
the Bush perspective will be Monty
Warner; Dr. David
Mills, professor of Modern Middle
East History at
Marshall U., will speak on behalf of
Patriots For Peace

March 30

Annual E-Day WV Environmental Council

10:00 am ~ 3:00 pm

State Capitol

Organizations and sustainable businesses
will display the latest news on bills of
interest circulating throughout the Senate
and House. *To register your group,*
organization or business contact: Denise
Poole at 304- 346-5905 or
deniseap@earthlink.net



We Need Your Support!

We can't do it without you

Please renew your membership, or send in a little something extra to help get us through the Session.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Here's my donation of \$ _____.

Please e-mail me action alerts to: _____

Clip and mail with your check to West Virginia Citizen Action Group,
1500 Dixie St., Charleston, WV 25311